

American Red Cross Armed Forces Emergency Services (AFES)

Overview

Understanding and using
American Red Cross
Armed Forces Emergency
Services (AFES).

- Who is eligible?
- What services are available?
- Accessing Red Cross assistance
- Other resources

Family emergencies can happen while service members are deployed. During these times of crisis, American Red Cross Armed Forces Emergency Services (AFES) keeps military personnel in touch with their families by delivering urgent messages -- a service provided through the organization's worldwide network of staff and volunteers. The AFES offers other support to service members and their families as well, including access to financial assistance through the military aid societies.

Who is eligible?

The Red Cross serves all members of the armed forces, including active-duty service members and their immediate family members, and members of the Guard and Reserve and their immediate family members.

What services are available?

Red Cross services for military members and their families include:

Emergency communications

The Red Cross can keep service members in touch with their families, relaying important news such as the death of a loved one, serious illness, or the birth of a child. The organization's worldwide network of chapters, stations, communication centers, and staff serving on installations and deployment sites links military personnel anywhere -- including ships at sea, embassies, and isolated military units -- with their loved ones. Communication services are also available to Department of Defense (DoD) civilian contract workers working on military installations overseas.

If you are in a situation where you cannot reach your deployed service member directly and need to send an emergency message, contact the Red Cross (see "Accessing Red Cross Assistance" below). Be sure to have the following information on hand when you call:

- full name, rank, branch of service, and Social Security number of the service member
- military address of the service member
- information about the deployed unit and the location of the rear detachment unit (for deployed service members only)

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- name, phone number, and relationship of person in the city or town where the emergency occurred (to provide more information if required)
- name and contact number for hospital or funeral home to verify the emergency

DoD policy does not require Red Cross verification of the emergency before commanders can approve emergency leave. However, it's best to check with your local command first.

Outreach to members of the Guard and Reserve and their families

In the past, community-based service members were often unaware of important Red Cross services until they were mobilized. Now the Red Cross reaches out to these service members and their families through its “Get to Know Us Before You Need Us” program.

Social services

Red Cross social services for service members and their families include counseling, family support, and assistance with representation at the Board of Veterans Appeals.

Access to financial assistance

The Red Cross works with the military aid societies, Army Emergency Relief, the Navy Marine Corps Relief Society, and the Air Force Aid Society, to provide financial assistance in some situations -- for example:

- emergency travel that requires the presence of the service member, retiree, or his or her immediate family members
- burial expenses for an immediate family member
- assistance that cannot wait until the next day, including food, temporary lodging, urgent medical needs, or the minimum amount needed to avoid utility shut off or eviction

Accessing Red Cross assistance

You can access the Red Cross in the following ways:

- *Active-duty service members stationed in the U.S. and their immediate family members* may call the AFES centers for help 7 days a week, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year at toll-free 1-877-272-7337.
- *Other family members who do not live in the service member's household, members of the Guard and Reserve, retirees, and civilians* may access Red Cross services through their local Red Cross Chapter, listed in local telephone directories and in the chapter directory at www.redcross.org/where/where.html.

- *Overseas personnel stationed on military installations* should call installation operators or the on-installation Red Cross office.
- *At overseas deployment locations*, contact Red Cross deployed staff members.

Other resources

American Red Cross

www.redcross.org

Provides a Red Cross chapter locator, a complete list of American Red Cross services, and information about special programs.

Your military support services

Each service branch sponsors information and support programs for service members and their families. You can call or visit any installation Army Community Service Center, Marine Corps Community Services, Fleet and Family Support Center, or Airman and Family Readiness Center regardless of your branch affiliation.

If you aren't near an installation, National Guard Family Assistance Centers are available in every state. The Local Community Resource Finder on the National Guard Family Program site at *www.guardfamily.org* will identify your closest center.

Military OneSource

This free 24-hour service is available to all active duty, Guard, and Reserve members (regardless of activation status) and their families. Consultants provide information and make referrals on a wide range of issues, including issues related to parenting, deployment, and reintegration. Free face-to-face counseling sessions (and their equivalent by phone or online) are also available. Call 1-800-342-9647 or go to *www.MilitaryOneSource.com* to learn more.

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